



MONTHLY AUGUST 2005 UPDATE

◆ Teens learn the power of 'leadership' at annual Youth Leadership Forum

More than 30 high school students attended this year's **Youth Leadership Forum**, taking advantage of a unique opportunity to gain leadership experience and develop personal and career goals.

Students interacted with leaders from business and government, presented testimony on a proposed bill that would impact students with disabilities, attended a mentors' luncheon, and met with Secretary **Kristen Cox** of the **Maryland Department of Disabilities**. Throughout the four-day conference, held in Annapolis and at Bowie State University from July 19 to 22, students participated in numerous leadership and goal setting exercises, as well as social activities.

Secretary Cox spoke to the students about personal empowerment, explaining that people with disabilities are making choices today that would have been unheard of even a decade ago.

"We all know how easy it is to sit back and let others do things for us and make our decisions," she said. "But ultimately, when we do that, we lose control and don't get what we want." Cox, who is blind, recounted a personal story about her experiences in high school, when she let her volunteer "reader" call the shots and read only what the volunteer thought Cox needed to know.

"I was so happy and grateful that someone was willing to help me that I didn't stand up for myself. I didn't want to rock the boat. As a result, I had a miserable year," she said. She learned through that and similar experiences that having a disability does not mean relinquishing control of one's life.

Sixteen-year-old **Ashley Wilson** of Crownsville, who hopes to become an FBI agent or join the U.S. Coast Guard, said attending the conference has helped boost her confidence. "I've gotten a lot out of it, especially with time management and leadership skills," she said. "And I've been able to talk to a lot of people with different disabilities, which has been really helpful for me."

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◆ Empowering People ◆

Governor Ehrlich Recognizes 15th Anniversary of Americans with Disabilities Act

Governor Robert L. Ehrlich, Jr. issued a Governor's Proclamation recognizing the 15th Anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), which was signed into law by **President George H.W. Bush** on July 26, 1990. The proclamation was presented to a number of organizations statewide that work with individuals with disabilities in a variety of settings.

In recognizing this profound advancement for people with disabilities, Gov. Ehrlich stated: "The Americans with Disabilities Act granted 54 million Americans equal access to public services and protection from employment discrimination. Here in Maryland, we are deeply committed to the principles of the ADA."

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◆ Extreme and Adaptive Sports Expo

The **Maryland Department of Disabilities** and **Baltimore City Department of Recreation and Parks** will sponsor an **Extreme & Adaptive Sports Expo** (EASE) featuring athletes with disabilities on **August 5 from 10:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.**

Representatives of the **Amped Riders Association** will perform skateboarding tricks and maneuvers at the event, to be held at **Carroll Park in Baltimore City**. The day-long Expo features demonstrations by the **Maryland Ravens** wheelchair basketball, the **League of Dreams** wheelchair baseball team, therapeutic horseback riding and an appearance by **Paralympic Discus Gold Medal Champion Larry Hughes**.

This free event is **open to all** and geared to youth and teens to demonstrate the variety of **athletic talent possessed by individuals with disabilities**. Performers from Amped Riders, all amputees, have been featured in national magazines and the League of Dreams has been featured on national television.

For more information, contact **Stephanie Murdock** at 410-767-3663 or smurdock@mdod.state.md.us or **Ellis Goodman** at 410-767-3656 or egoodman@mdod.state.md.us.



◆ ADA

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“On this fifteenth anniversary, we must all redouble our efforts to ensure economic opportunity, civic participation and self-sufficiency for the thousands of citizens with disabilities living in Maryland.”

Kristen Cox, Secretary of Maryland's **Department of Disabilities** recognized Gov. Ehrlich and his staff for their ongoing commitment to disability issues, starting with the establishment of the nation's first cabinet-level **Department of Disabilities** in 2004.

Other recent accomplishments include:

- ◆ **Improved paratransit on-time rates.** The Ehrlich Administration also intends to purchase up to 125 fully accessible vehicles each year over the next six years, resulting in a fully-accessible, fixed-route capacity.
- ◆ **Creation of a multi-step emergency preparedness plan** for citizens with disabilities.
- ◆ **Strengthening of programs to provide employed individuals with disabilities an opportunity to enroll in the Medicaid program when they would not otherwise be eligible because of increased income.**
- ◆ **Establishment of a task force to study self-directed care for mental health services.** The Task Force for Self-Directed Care will determine how best to create a model of care for mental health consumers that would allow maximum input from individuals.



A proclamation from Gov. Robert L. Ehrlich, Jr. was presented during an event at Anne Arundel Community College commemorating the 15th Anniversary of the ADA. Pictured from left to right are: Mimi Stoops, Coordinator, AACC Disability Support Services; Ellis Goodman, Special Policy Advisor, MDOD; Dr. Martha Smith, President, AACC; and Art Ebersberger, Chairman, AACC Board of Trustees.

◆ Youth Leadership Forum

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Keslye Neal, 17, who will be a senior at Liberty High School in Eldersburg this fall, said the legislative experience at the Maryland State House in Annapolis convinced him that students must take responsibility and champion their own causes.

“The kids who have the disabilities were so aware – they knew what their needs were and what they needed to succeed. They have as much understanding of the issues as anyone else, and it made me realize that we do need to be leaders and advocate for ourselves.”

The Youth Leadership Forum, initiated in 1992 in California, is now conducted annually in more than 30 states, including Maryland, which held its first forum in 2000. Sponsors of Maryland's annual forum include: the **Maryland Department of Disabilities**; the **Maryland State Department of Education's Division of Special Education/Early Intervention Services** and **Division of Rehabilitation Services**; the **Maryland Department of Human Resources**; the **Maryland Statewide Independent Living Council**; and **Independence Now, Inc.**

For more information, visit www.md-ylf.org or call **Cathy Raggio**, Chairwoman, Maryland Youth Leadership Forum, at 301-277-2839.